PRESBYTERIAN COMMITTEE OF PUBLICATION RICHMOND.

The Embarcation. — Page 12.

THE

MISSING BOAT.

RICHMOND:
PRESBYTERIAN COMMITTEE OF PUBLICATION.

THE LIBRARY
Union Theological Seminary
RICHMOND, VA.

SUN
Sch
XN
M678

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE.

THE EMBARKATION 5

CHAPTER II.

ON THE SEA 23

CHAPTER III.

THE SEARCH 52

CHAPTER IV.

THE RESTORATION 75

THE MISSING BOAT.

CHAPTER I.

THE EMBARKATION.

ONE Saturday afternoon towards the end of summer, several boys were playing together on the sea-shore. The sun was warm, but passing clouds every now and then tempered its heat, darkening the surface of the sea in spots, throwing the tall cliffs in some parts into deep shadow, while in others they stood out boldly, and sparkled in the bright rays.

The top of these cliffs commanded an extensive view of a long line of coast, bounded at each side by two far-projecting

headlands, which enclosed between them a very large bay. The line was broken in many places by smaller bays inclosed in their own headlands; while in the valleys behind these, and on the sides of the opposite inland hills, peeped out the roofs of houses, and here and there the towers of churches, marking the sites of the small towns and villages which were scattered along the coast.

It was on the shore of one of these small bays, near to a village called Ashcombe, that the boys were playing. A tall cliff rose behind them, bounding one side of the bay, against the foot of which the waves washed in some parts at high water; in others there was a broad beach of mingled sand and shingle, which was only covered during winter storms or at very high tides. The cliff sloped gradually down to the shore about the center of the bay, and then rising again, stretched along

the other side out into the sea, ending in a low line of rocks, which were mostly covered by the tide, except at quite low water. These rocks were the frequent resort of visitors to the place, as many curious specimens of shells and sea-weed and other marine productions were to be found among them. Through the opening between the cliffs a small river flowed into the sea, and a road led from the beach up to the village and the adjoining country. The village itself lay behind the cliff, and was thus shut out from view of the beach; but a good path ran along the top of the cliff, and rough foot-tracks here and there wound down the front of it to the shore, used by the fishermen to save themselves the trouble of going round by the road.

A net full of fish had been drawn to the shore that afternoon, and the boys had been active enough then, helping or hindering as the case might be; but the fish

had all been removed, and the men, having drawn up their boats and spread their nets to dry, had now left the beach. The boys continued to amuse themselves, throwing the pebbles and sand at each other, or trying how near they could venture to the water's edge without getting wet, while some, taking off their shoes and stockings, and turning up the legs of their trousers, waded into the sea as far as they dared.

While they were so engaged a small boat approached the shore, in which were two men. Running her aground, they sprang on shore and drew the boat up, but not very far, one saying to the other, "No need to trouble further, Jem; I shall be coming back in an hour or two, for Mr. Maitland, the London gentleman, has engaged me to go with him to dredge at the rocks this evening. We'll just lay the oars in the bottom of the boat, and go. As

the tide is on the ebb, she'll be safe enough till then."

"Oh, very well," said Jem; and having done as they said, the two men started up the cliff together, and were shortly out of sight.

They had no sooner disappeared than Ben Sanders, one of the eldest of the boys, called out, "Now, boys, now is our time! Jonas says he isn't coming back for an hour or two, and he has left his boat so near the water, we can easily push her out and have a bit of a row. Won't it be a lark?" So saying, he rushed towards the boat, followed by two or three of his companions.

"No, no, Ben," called out Charley Bateson; "you know we've no right to touch the boat, and Jonas would be very angry if he were to come."

"But, then, he isn't coming," said Ben. "I heard him say he wasn't, for an hour or

two; we shall have quite time to put her back all right, and he need know nothing about it."

"If you move her, *we* have not strength to pull her up again over that steep bit of pebble," said Charley, interposing as Ben was about to push her off.

"No, indeed, Ben, we can't," said several others; "and then, shan't we catch it when Jonas comes back!"

"Oh, well, never mind; we can at least play at make-believe then," said Ben, jumping into the boat where it lay. "Here, Tom Hill, you take one oar and I'll take the other, and won't we have a jolly row. Ned Harris shall be steersman, or Charley Bateson, if *he's* not too much afraid of Jonas," he added, sneeringly.

"No, I'll have nothing to do with it; you've no right to touch the boat," said Charley, walking off to a little distance.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Ben; "he's afraid of Jonas. I do believe he takes that shadow on the cliff for him. Never mind, lads, we'll have our row; *we are not afraid.* Dick Barlow and Bob Perrot, you must be passengers; lift in little Johnny Craig, — he can't climb over the side. Now then, here we go; — isn't it fine, eh, boys?"

All laughed heartily, and seemed to enjoy the joke amazingly, making fun of Charley, and trying to get one or two others, who still remained outside, to join with them. "You, Will Price and Jem Davis, you aren't going to be led by that cowardly Charley, — he has no spirit for any thing," cried Ben.

"Ben, you've no call to say that; you know as well as all of us that Charley is no coward," said Jem Davis; "and it's my opinion that you'd best leave the boat, all of you, before you get into any more

mischief. For my part, father wants me at four o'clock, so I must be off. Dick, you know you're wanted too."

"Ay, ay, I'm coming," said Dick; "all in good time."

He amused himself a little longer in the boat, and then followed Jem, who had walked away without waiting to see the result of his words. Ben and his companions continued their sport, and at length prevailed upon Will Price to take Dick's place in the boat, notwithstanding Charley's remonstrances.

Shortly after he had got in, Mrs. Leigh, a lady of the neighborhood, who was on her way to a friend living about a mile distant, to whose dwelling she frequently preferred going by the beach instead of climbing the cliff, passed near to them, and noticing what they were about, came up to them.

"Why, boys, what are you doing in that

boat? you know you've no business there. It's Jonas King's boat, isn't it?"

"Yes, ma'am," replied one of the boys.

"Well, now, take my advice, and come away from it. You know you are wrong to meddle with it, and it will make Jonas very angry. Robert Perrot," she continued, "I am sorry to see you are among them; you ought to know better. Come away, my boy."

No one answered, and Mrs. Leigh, finding she could not move them, continued her walk; whereupon Ben, who had been muttering to himself in an undertone while she was speaking, began to talk out loud against her. "What business was it of hers, he wondered; she could not see boys amusing themselves without poking and meddling, — spoiling sport and fault-finding; — the boat was none of hers, and what was it to her if Jonas was angry," and more to the same effect.

"Now, Ben, you know all that's not true," broke in Robert Perrot. Mrs. Leigh was his Sunday-school teacher; he was very fond of her, and he had hung his head, and looked very uneasy when she addressed him. Though false shame had prevented his attending to her well-meant warning, he could not quietly hear her thus abused. "You should not speak so; you know she is the readiest of any one to help us when we are at our games, and always —"

"There, be quiet, will you?" exclaimed Ben; "We don't want a list of your dear Mrs. Leigh's good qualities. Sit down, can't you? you're in the way," as Bob quickly rose up.

"I'm going to get out," said Bob; "I've had enough of it;" and eluding Ben's attempt to stop him, he leaped out of the boat, but directly cried out, "I say, Ben, you had best take care; that boat has

slipped down a good bit, and she'll be afloat in no time, I tell you."

Now this was what Ben secretly desired, and had even quietly been trying to effect, so he was very angry at Bob's remark, and called out loudly in abuse of him, bidding him hold his tongue, and go after good Mrs. Leigh, to show her how well he obeyed her.

Bob only laughed; and again saying, "Take care of yourselves, that's all," ran away, and might soon be seen climbing the cliff.

The others, however, had heard something of what he said, and began to look about them; and little Johnny Craig called out, "He did not want the boat to go out on the sea, and would get out. Ned, help me out."

"No, Ned, don't do any thing of the sort," said Ben, who was exceedingly vexed; but wishing to quiet the little boy, said to him,

in playful tones, "Passengers must sit quiet till we get to the landing-place, you know, Johnny."

But Johnny would not be pacified, and still begged to be let out, till Ben, losing patience, struck and pushed him down. He cried loudly, and called to Charley to come and help him out. Charley, at this appeal, approached the boat. "Be off, Charley," said Ben; "you won't play with us, and you shan't meddle; — keep him off, boys, he has nothing to do here."

Two or three of the boys sided with Ben, and opposed Charley in his efforts to get hold of Johnny, who was crying and stretching out his hands to him, till at length, Charley, finding he could accomplish nothing from the outside, and now thoroughly roused, leaped into the boat, and disregarding the blows aimed at him, seized firm hold of Johnny, and prepared to jump out with him. But the

boys held back; and at that moment Ben gave a vigorous push against the beach with the oar which he still held in his hand. The boat, aided by the retiring force of a strong wave which had just broken, was afloat directly. Ben gave a shout of triumph, and another push, which sent her out so far as to preclude the possibility of Charley's leaping again on shore, which, upon seeing what had happened, he had instantly redoubled his efforts to do.

"Oh, Ben, Ben! do push her in again," he exclaimed.

"No, no, my lad," said Ben; "you're here now, and here you shall stay. Pull her out a bit, Tom; he shall have a row in spite of himself."

Charley laid hold of the oar to prevent this, and struggling with Tom, between them it fell overboard into the water.

"Now you've lost it," cried Ben, reaching over the side to catch it, if possible; but as it floated away from him, he exclaimed, "What are we to do if we lose Jonas's oar?" and seemed inclined to spring out after it, but was pulled back by the others.

"Stop, Ben," they called out; "the water's deep now, and you can't swim, you know; you'll only be drowned."

Struck by this obvious truth, Ben desisted, and for a while they watched the oar in silence as it floated further and further away, till at last Ned Harris exclaimed, "I say, Ben, we're getting a good way from the beach, and as we've only one oar now, had we not better try what we can do with it to get us back?"

"Try what you please," answered Ben, sulkily; adding, angrily, as he thought of what Jonas's displeasure would be, "It's all that tiresome Charley; if he had but

minded his own business, and let others alone, it would have been all right."

"Indeed, Ben," said Charley, "I am very sorry; but if we can get back to the shore, perhaps we can find some one who will go after the oar. You know most about rowing; do take this one, and see what you can do."

After a little grumbling, Ben did so; but he was very unskilled in the management of a boat, and not understanding how to work with one oar at the stern, his efforts at the side resulted in nothing but turning the boat round, and, if any thing, she was further off from the shore at the end than she was at the beginning.

"I'm afraid it's no use," he said, in a more sobered tone than he had yet used. "I don't know how to manage it; the tide's ebbing strongly, and the wind's off shore too; we shall just be carried out to sea."

"Oh Ben, I hope not," exclaimed Charley, to whom such a possibility had not occurred for a moment.

"I don't see how it's to be helped," said Ben, moodily.

Little Johnny at this began to cry again, calling for his mother; and, clinging to Charley, he said, "Oh, do take me home; Charley, do take me home!"

"Hush, Johnny, I can't now; but be quiet, and we'll try and do all we can."

"Look, Ben, there's the oar nearer to us now," said Ned Harris; "perhaps we could get it again, and then we should be all right."

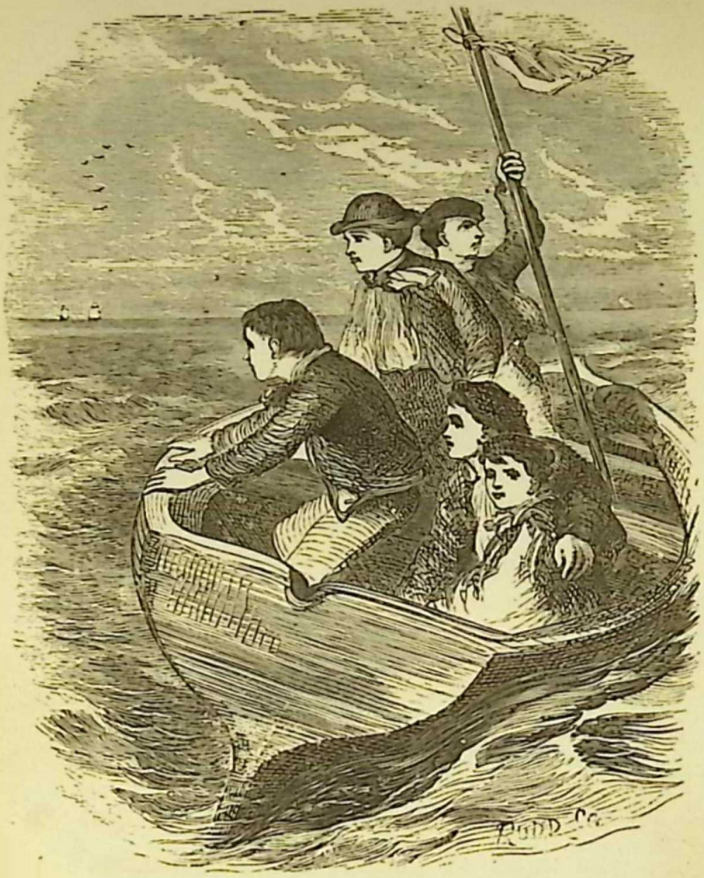
Many were the efforts they made for that purpose, and tantalizing the disappointment, till at last they gave up in despair, at a greater distance from their object than ever. The boat had now drifted beyond the headlands of the bay. As the coast on each side opened to their view,

and they perceived how far from the shore they were, they became really alarmed at the prospect before them. There was not a soul to be seen on the beach ; and though they began shouting loudly, hoping to attract attention, they remained unheard and unnoticed.

Again they renewed their efforts with the oar, and again those efforts proved fruitless. Then, in their despair, they turned upon Ben, and began to accuse him as the cause of their misfortune. He angrily retorted, and hard words passed, till Charley, who had been silently trying to comfort little Johnny, exclaimed, "There's one of the fishing boats; let's try and attract the attention of the men in her." This they endeavored to do by shouting and screaming, and Will Price took off his jacket and waved it on the point of the oar.

It was all in vain, however; the men

were either at too great a distance or too much engrossed with their own affairs to heed them, and the poor boys, at last, desisted, and sat down in the boat wearied and dispirited.



On the Sea.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE SEA.

BY this time they had drifted so far that Ashcombe was entirely out of sight from them, and a sense of their forlorn and deserted condition began to force itself upon them. Thoughts of their home, and a chill fear lest they should never return thither, crept upon them. Ned Harris and Will Price began loudly to lament that they had ever been persuaded to enter into the boat; while little Johnny Craig renewed his cries and entreaties to be taken to his mother.

Ben sat moodily silent, conscious that he was most to blame; his companions' lamentations cut him to the heart, though

they were far too deeply sorrowful to utter the angry reproaches against him in which they had previously indulged. His self-reproach became intolerable when he saw Charley, who had drawn little Johnny to him, and was endeavoring to soothe his grief, unable himself to restrain his tears, which were quietly rolling down his cheeks as he bent over the child. Ben knew that Charley was the only remaining child of his widowed mother, who depended upon him for many little services, and the thought of the agony it would be to her when she missed her boy came suddenly over him, and he felt at once it was of her that Charley was thinking. He sprang up, and crossing over towards Charley, exclaimed, as he held out his hand, "Oh, Charley, I am so very sorry! can you ever forgive me?"

Charley looked up, and, smiling through his tears, said, "Oh, yes, Ben; and for the

matter of that, we are all something to blame."

"Not you, Charley, I'm sure," said Tom Hill.

"I needn't have got into the boat," said Charley. "But there, never mind now; just let me lay down little Johnny, for he's gone to sleep, and it's the best thing for him; and then, Ben, don't you think we might try again with the oar? — and anyhow, I hope some one will soon come to search for us, for Jonas will miss his boat; and, if we keep a sharp look-out, we may get back again without harm."

Cheered by this thought, the boys roused themselves, settled Johnny comfortably in the bottom of the boat, and then Charley and Ben did their best with the oar; but that best was very little: and though all watched eagerly on every side, they could discern no trace of any boat in quest of them, or indeed of any

boat at all. The night now was rapidly coming on, the light had grown dim, clouds had risen, and a cold wind blowing round them sent a chill over the boys; they shivered, and their hearts sank as they faced the prospect of a night on the sea.

Johnny woke, and began to complain of hunger and cold.

"We're all cold and hungry, Johnny," said Charley; "but you see there's nothing for any of us."

"I've got a crust of bread in my pocket," said Tom Hill; "let him have that."

He gave it to the little fellow, who ate it eagerly, and asked for a "drink."

"Indeed, I've got nothing to drink, Johnny," said Tom, — nothing but sea-water, and you can't drink that."

"But it is so dark: aren't we going home?" asked Johnny.

At first no one answered, till Tom said,

"How can we, till somebody comes to help us? for we've lost our oar, you know, so we can't row."

"But when will they come?" said Johnny.

"Indeed, I can't tell; perhaps not to-night."

"But shall we have to stay all night upon the sea?" said Johnny, in a tone of alarm. "Shan't we be drowned?"

"Very likely," said Tom, carelessly.

"Tom, how can you frighten the child so?" said Charley, seeing Johnny's terrified looks. Then to the little boy he said, soothingly, "We hope not, Johnny, and we won't be afraid, even if we have to stay all night upon the sea;" adding, in a low voice, "God can take care of us on sea as well as on land; in the darkness as well as in the light, — can't he Johnny?"

"Yes," said the little boy; and he came closer to Charley.

"Lie down here by me, and I will screen you from the wind; and perhaps you will go to sleep and know nothing about it till to-morrow morning."

The child did as he was bid. Charley made him very comfortable, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing him drop asleep.

"I can't see the sign of a vessel any where," called out Tom Hill; "we seem to be altogether out of the way of any of them."

"A very good thing, I think," said Ned Harris, "now it is so dark, else we might be run down by one, without anybody knowing any thing about it. Oh, dear! I wish I was safe on shore. I wonder nobody has come out to look for us."

"I dare say they have," said Ben. "Jonas wouldn't lose his boat so easily; but consider how dark it's getting, and what a speck we are upon the sea."

"Yes," said Charley; "no chance of

any one seeing us till morning now; there's nothing for it but to pass the night as best we can. When daylight comes we may get help."

The boys did not seem much to like the notion of this, but it was very evidently the only prospect before them.

"Oh! well," said Will Price, "I shall try and go to sleep as Johnny has done; it'll be the best way;" and he curled himself up as comfortably as he could in the bottom of the boat.

Tom and Ned for some time kept up a flow of talk about one thing and another, at times appealing to Charley or Ben, till at last they gradually ceased, and seemed to have dropped into slumber.

The other two remained for a long time silent without moving. The stars began to show themselves overhead, and at last the moon rose, casting a long line of silvery light upon the water. A long, low

bank of clouds lay heavily in the north-eastern horizon, and at times a chilly wind blew over the boat, making the boys draw their jackets closer round them. Both seemed full of thought. At length Ben rose from his seat, stepped quietly over the sleeping forms of his companions, and carefully avoiding any disturbance of little Johnny, placed himself near to Charley.

"Charley," he said, "I don't much like the look of those clouds; I hope the weather is not going to change."

"I hope not," said Charley; "but I've been looking at them too. Do you think it will?"

"I can't tell," replied Ben; "but father said, when he went out this morning, he thought there would be wind before night; but I hope not."

"Indeed, so do I," said Charley, "for oh, Ben, what *should* we do?"

"We could do *nothing*," said Ben, in a

low voice; adding, after a moment's pause, as he glanced round at the others, "it's all my doing, too."

Charley could not in truth gainsay this, so he said nothing, only he stole his hand softly into Ben's, as it lay on his knee. Ben looked up, then down again, and said, quickly, "Aren't *you* frightened, Charley?"

"No — yes, a little; that is, I was when I first noticed the clouds and the wind, and thought how helpless we were; but then I thought of something else, and I wasn't so frightened after that."

"That *God* would take care of us, I suppose, as you told Johnny?"

"Yes," whispered Charley; then growing bolder, "Isn't that a good thought, Ben?"

"All very well for you," said Ben; "you're always a good boy, and never do the wrong things I do. There now, I

know what you are going to say; but it's no use to contradict;" seeing Charley about to speak. "You *are* far better than I am. Why, I scarcely ever go to school now, and I often use bad words, and I'm constantly getting into scrapes of all sorts, and sometimes, lately, I've not stuck to the truth, and — and — I don't know how it was, I don't generally care much about it; but somehow, just now, when they were quiet, and I saw the clouds, and heard the wind moaning so, it all came over me at once, how bad I was, — and suppose there should come a storm, — and I felt I'm not fit to die, and I was so frightened. Charley, what shall I do?"

He said all this fast, in a low voice which faltered at the end.

"Ben," said Charley earnestly, "I've been feeling nearly the same, for I'm not as good as you say, Ben — indeed I'm not. But why don't you pray to God, and tell

him all, and ask him to forgive you? You know the Bible says, 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins;' you know that, Ben?"

"Yes, I know; I've so often heard Mr. Wilson say that in church; but I have so often done wrong, when I knew well it was wrong, that perhaps God will not hear me now."

"Oh! yes, indeed he will, Ben; he knows all about the wrong you've done, you know."

"As if *that* was any comfort; it is just what I can't bear to think of."

"Oh! Ben, I think it is such a comfort to think that he knows all about our faults already, before we come to him; we can't really hide any thing, you know, and I like to think God knows all the worst and all the best of me too."

"Well, but," said Ben, after a moment's thought, "I feel at such a distance from

him, Charley, as if I couldn't speak; I don't know how."

"You just try, Ben, and you'll find you'll be helped; you don't know how good he is. Don't you remember what the Bible says about our being 'made near by the blood of Christ?' Think of him, Ben, how he loved us to die for us. And ask him to help you, and then you will feel quite *near*. I'm sure I was frightened just now, until I thought of Jesus Christ, and asked him to take care of me; and now, though I am a little afraid still, I'm not frightened any longer."

His voice sunk very low. Ben looked up at him; he was looking far away over the black sea, up towards where the moon was nearly lost behind the dark clouds, which were spreading over the sky; he was pale and serious, and his eyes seemed glistening with tears; but for all that,

there was a bright, trustful look on his face, which made Ben feel that he hadn't been speaking words of course, but that they were a real help to him just then. The words, "how He loved us, to die for us," came back to him with their soft, earnest sound; they seemed to go down into his very heart: "made near by his blood." Ben felt he was not so distant; and with a great gush of tears he buried his face in his hands, and called silently in his heart to God his Father for pardon and help.

So they remained a long time. The thought how bad he was came over Ben again with more force than ever, but it did not frighten him so much; as wrong things he had done came back to him, he tried to put them all into his prayer, and then they were not such a weight upon him.

Poor Ben! it seemed as if all his life

came back to him then. He scarcely remembered his mother: she had died when he was very young, and a little baby-sister at the same time. They were like shadows in Ben's memory, and visited him very seldom, but they came back to him now; and he recollected, too, his father's grief, at which he had looked wonderingly, when they were carried away to be laid in the green churchyard; and how afterwards he had been his father's one great care, and when he came home from his daily work, in a quarry about a mile from Ashcombe, how he would take his little boy, in the the summer, out upon the beach, and in winter on his knee by the fire, and seem to have no other thought than how most to promote his happiness. Will Sanders was no great scholar himself; he could read with difficulty even very simple words, but this only made him more anxious that Ben should do better; so, as soon as he

was old enough, he sent him regularly to school. And Ben could read very well, and was by no means a dunce, only he was very thoughtless and fond of play, and from being necessarily left so much to himself, rather inclined to be headstrong and self-willed. Lately he had taken up with some bad companions, and had suffered himself to be led by them into more serious offenses than he would have committed alone.

This was no excuse for Ben: he knew better, and had, moreover, often been talked to by his father, who was greatly grieved at the things he heard of his son; and while he listened to him Ben would feel sorry, and promise to do better; for he really loved his father, and perhaps for a few days he would keep his word, and make his father's heart glad with his improvement, and with the hope that he would be steady now. But soon he would

begin to be careless in little things, and think it very troublesome to be so particular, and then in a few weeks' time he would be as bad as before, and neglect school whenever he could manage to slip away, until he found himself at length still further from the right path than at first, and fell into disgrace and punishment.

This downhill course had gone on more rapidly for the last six months, during which Ben had been much oftener absent from school than present there, and had got into more bad ways than he was quite aware of; for though conscience often disturbed him, and when he saw his father's sad face he would feel some concern, he tried to smother down such feelings, and would not suffer himself to think upon his conduct, which would have been his first step to amendment.

Now, however, out on the open sea, under that wild-looking night-sky, something

spoke in the boy's heart, with a voice that would not be silenced. He saw himself as he was: disobedient, ungrateful, careless of his opportunities, wasting his advantages, grieving his father, wandering from his God; and this very last piece of willfulness had imperiled not only his own life, but that of his companions also. He felt crushed, overwhelmed, with the consciousness of his sin and folly; and then looking up and seeing Charley, whom he had called a coward, and whom he had forced into the danger, but who had never opened his lips to reproach him, sitting there so quietly, with the child resting upon him, he had instinctively asked himself who was the coward now; and with an impulse he could not resist, he had come over to him. He had not intended to speak as he had done, but something drew him on till now he sat there, humbled and penitent, more really sorry than he

had ever felt before; but at the same time his heart felt lighter; and down, very deep down indeed, he whispered a resolve, that if he were spared now, he would be different in future.

Charley, meanwhile, sat silent by his side, looking at him now and then, but not speaking. Charley felt very sad; he had been thinking of his mother, and how terrible her anxiety would be. He knew she must have missed him long ere this, and wondered if she knew what had become of him — and, oh! suppose he should never return to her! He had cried very bitterly to himself over these thoughts, till at length he remembered what would have been his mother's advice, and tried to cast all his care upon God, committing himself and his mother into his hands; and then, as he told Ben, he did not feel frightened any longer, though he could not help feeling very sad.

So they continued a long time. Ben had ceased sobbing, but was still sitting with his face buried in his hands, apparently not noticing outward objects. Charley watched it get darker and darker, as the moon became wholly obscured by the black clouds; the wind howled dismally, and he felt a few warning drops of rain. The boat began to toss about on the rising waves, and at last one of them struck her on the side, and the spray dashed over the boys.

Then Ben looked up, and met Charley's eye. No need of words; they understood each other's thoughts. Ben rose, and put out his hand: "Charley, whatever happens, thank you for what you said to me just now; and, Charley, say you forgive me for bringing you into this."

"Oh, yes, yes, Ben; indeed I do!" said Charley, eagerly grasping his hand. He was going to say something more, but Ben

was at that moment nearly thrown down upon him, by a sudden lurch of the boat, and the water again broke over them, this time with more force than before, completely wetting the sleeping boys. Ben recovered himself just as the others, roused from their slumbers, were looking wildly around.

"We're in for a rough night of it, I'm afraid," he said; "but we must do the best we can. It may be only a passing squall."

It was not long, however, before they were again deluged.

"Bale it out," cried Charley. "Ned, Tom, bale it out with your caps, or we shall be swamped to a certainty."

He set the example himself, and they all worked vigorously; they saw it was their only chance. Even little Johnny, who, waking up, grew frightened, and was beginning to cry, was pacified by Charley,

and set to work to help. To add to their discomfort, it soon began to rain heavily.

About an hour — it seemed a whole night to the boys — had passed, when the squall began a little to abate its violence; and the moon, suddenly breaking out, threw a faint light over the sea.

"Look, look!" cried Tom Hill, "there's a ship, and she seems to be bearing down upon us."

All looked in the direction to which he pointed, and saw a large vessel apparently approaching them, though they could but dimly make her out.

"Shout, boys!" cried Ned Harris; "perhaps they may see, and take us on board."

They all did so, raising their voices to the utmost, but the vessel passed on unheeding; they had neither been heard nor seen, and the moonbeam was quickly obscured.

The boys were bitterly disappointed. "Shame on them!" exclaimed Will Price; "they must have seen us, I'm sure."

"Don't say that, Will," said Charley; "they never would have left us if they had."

"But how could they help it?" returned Will. "We were so near, and the moon —"

His voice was silenced by the dash of a wave, which knocked him over, as he stood eagerly looking after the retreating vessel. Ned Harris caught him as he fell, and saved him from going overboard.

No more was said, and the boys continued to work on, silently baling out the water. With all their efforts, they could at times only just keep themselves afloat, and they began to grow very weary.

So passed the night, which seemed long indeed to them. Morning began to break, and as the light gradually increased, and

the boys looked around them, they could see nothing but sea and sky. The wind was lessening; but still their utmost vigilance was needed, for the waves ran very high, and often broke over their frail vessel. Poor lads! they were wet and tired, and cold and hungry; and as the clouds broke, and the mists dispersed, and they could catch a glimpse of the shore, they tried in vain to recognize any point of land they knew. They had drifted far beyond their knowledge. The wind, too, was off shore, and as the time wore on they found themselves perceptibly carried farther from the land.

"There's no chance for us," said Ned, "except some vessel may pass, and we can make them see us."

"Yes, we must keep a good look-out," said Tom.

This they did, but in vain. They could see the white sails of a vessel here and

there sparkling in the sun, but much too far off to allow of their attracting the attention of those on board.

There was a long silence; they were too dispirited to talk. At last little Johnny said, "It's Sunday, and they'll all be just going to Sunday school at Ashcombe. I wonder if they're thinking of us." The boys started. Johnny seemed to have spoken out what was in the thoughts of all. Charley was about to answer, but suddenly turned away his head and leaned over the side of the boat. For a few moments none spoke. At last Tom said, "Yes, Johnny, I have no doubt they're thinking of us, and wondering where we are."

"I dare say they're singing now," continued the little boy. "I wonder what hymn it is? Why can't we sing, too, Tom, and then it will seem as if we were at home; shan't we, Tom?"

Tom did not answer. Charley turned round: "Yes, Johnny, we can sing if you like. I have my little hymn-book in my pocket."

The book was produced, and a hymn chosen, and the voices of the boys were soon all raised in a well-known tune, from their solitary little boat, a mere speck upon the wide sea. One hymn led to another; and they sang several times. After their last hymn, which, at Johnny's earnest request (he said it was "grandfather's favorite"), had been "Rock of Ages," they sank into silence, and seemed lost in thought. What those thoughts were, it might not be difficult to guess. Johnny's head gradually sank heavily upon his bosom, and Will Price laid the sleeping child in the bottom of the boat, in the most easy position he could find, saying, "Poor little fellow, he's very good!"

"Yes, indeed," said Ben, thoughtfully;

and then coloring crimson, he looked round, and said out loud, "Boys, I've been wanting to tell you all. I know it's all my fault we're in this danger, and I don't know if we shall ever get to land again. I should like to know you all forgive me, if you can, for—" His voice faltered; he held out his hand to Tom, who was nearest him,—"Will you shake hands, Tom?"

The boys could scarcely conceal their surprise, but all shook hands with him in turn. Charley was last, and it was a warm grasp he gave, while he looked at him with the tears full in his eyes, but said nothing. Ben returned the grasp, and then stood for some moments with his back to the rest, looking far away over the sea.

The silence was first broken by Will Price, who said, "I dare say Mr. Wilson and they all will think of us in church this morning."

"That they will, I'm sure," said Charley.

"And perhaps then we may get safe home after all," added Will.

Ben heard, and seemed to catch his thought. Looking round quickly, he said, "Then, if they're all doing that for us, why should we not do it for ourselves? Charley, I dare say you can remember some prayers, and ask God to help us in our great trouble and danger."

He spoke reverently, and the others knelt at once, as well as himself, taking care not to disturb the sleeping Johnny. Charley repeated several verses from the Psalms which seemed suitable to their case, offered a simple prayer, and all joined in the Lord's Prayer.

"We can do nothing more now, but wait quietly, and keep our eyes about us," said Ben; and he seated himself at the stern of the boat again.

The others seemed to agree, and sat down as they fancied. Charley employed himself with his hymn-book, till at length fatigue and anxiety overcame him, and he dropped asleep, leaning against Will, who was in much the same case. Tom and Ned whispered together for some time in a low voice, till at length they, too, followed the example set them, and fell into a sound slumber.

The little boat floated solitary on the water. The sun was shining strongly, and beating down upon them. Ben looked round upon his sleeping companions, then at the distant land and the far-stretching sea; a feeling of terrible loneliness and a sickening fear as to what would be their fate came over him; he clasped his hands together in an agony of distress. Soon, however, better thoughts came again, and he was able to take comfort in committing himself and them to the care of their all-

merciful Father in Heaven. He was spent with all he had gone through,—bodily fatigue and mental suffering, aggravated by want of food and rest. As he grew calmer, he could scarcely keep himself awake. He roused himself many times, thinking it but his duty to keep watch for the others. At length, however, fairly worn out, he unconsciously yielded to his overpowering drowsiness, and, like the rest, fell fast asleep.

The little frail boat and its helpless occupants continued to toss about on the waves, rising and falling with every swell. The wind played with their hair and their garments, and whistled soft music round them, while the summer sun shone in its brightness full upon them. Well for them that they were not *alone*, but that an ever-wakeful Eye was over them, and an ever-attentive Ear was open to their prayers.

CHAPTER III.

THE SEARCH.

AND what, all this time, was the state of things at Ashcombe?

In the course of the evening Jonas King came down to the shore, to get things in readiness for his row to the rocks with Mr. Maitland, who had engaged to meet him on the beach. Much to his surprise, he could not find his boat, nor any traces of her. At first, he thought some of his comrades must have borrowed it without leave, and he was inclined to be very angry with the offenders. He walked along towards a man who was at a little distance, and asked if he had seen any one go off in his boat.

"No, that I haven't," replied the man; "there's no one gone off just lately. I've been here for a good half-hour, and there's no one been down; only Hardy's just come in with his boat over there," pointing to a group of men some way off. "Best ask him; mayhap he'll have seen them, if any one has gone off in her."

Jonas walked toward the men, who were standing together in a group, and apparently talking over something of interest.

"Hardy, have you seen my boat?" asked Jonas. "I left her here a couple of hours ago, and now I can't find a trace of her. Did you meet her outside anywhere? If I knew who'd dare to meddle with her, I'd make them repent it, I know."

"I've not seen the *boat*, Jonas, for certain; but Jem Dawes, here, was just saying he thought this was your *oar*. We

picked it up floating near Long Point there."

"To be sure, it's mine," said Jonas, after examining it. "How can it have got loose, and out there?"

Various conjectures were uttered, but no one could guess who could have taken the boat, nor why, if any one had, the oar should be found by itself afloat on the water. They were so engrossed that they did not perceive Mr. Maitland's approach, till he said, "Well, King, where's your boat? I thought we were to start at six."

"That's just more than I can tell, sir," replied Jonas, and proceeded to acquaint Mr. Maitland with his perplexity.

"Strange, certainly," said that gentleman. "Are you sure you drew her up sufficiently high upon the beach, so that she could not have been floated away by the waves?"

"She was quite out of reach of the water, sir," said Jonas, "and the tide was ebbing, as you know. And besides, sir, that would not account for the oar being found afloat. I laid both oars carefully in the bottom before I left. Jem Patch was with me. I left her just there, sir; I'll show you;" and both walked toward the spot, where the mark left by the boat on the shingle was still visible. They examined it attentively, and then looked out toward the sea, as though they would trace the course of the missing boat.

"Well, Mr. Maitland, you are off to your favorite rocks this fine evening, I suppose?" said a pleasant voice behind them. Mr. Maitland started, and turned round to shake hands with Mrs. Leigh, who was on her return from her friend's house.

"Such was my intention, certainly," he said, "and I had expected to be there by

this time, but Jonas King's boat has mysteriously disappeared, and I am thus deprived of my usual means of conveyance."

Mrs. Leigh's face grew grave and a little anxious, as Mr. Maitland proceeded to recount, in answer to her questions, how the boat had been missed and the oar found.

"I hope," she said at length, "nothing amiss has happened. I passed by two or three hours ago, Jonas, and saw several boys at play in your boat; I told them they were wrong, and tried to persuade them to leave it, but ineffectually as far as I could perceive."

"Indeed, ma'am, — the little rascals! I'll venture to say now Jack Syms was one of them. He's up to all kinds of mischief, is that boy."

"No, Jonas, Jack was not there. I saw Ben Sanders and Robert Perrot," she

added, rather reluctantly, "and one or two others I did not recognize."

"Ben Sanders!" exclaimed Jonas; "he's near as bad as Jack Syms. I'll pay him off, that I will."

"If you can catch him, Jonas," said Mr. Maitland, laughing.

"If you please, ma'am," said one of the bystanders, "I saw little Bob Perrot up in the village just now."

"Then let some one go and look for him, and bring him here," said Mr. Maitland. "We'll learn as much as we can from him, at any rate."

The man started off with right good will on this errand.

"Are you quite sure it is your oar, Jonas?" asked Mrs. Leigh.

"Oh, yes, for certain, ma'am; no doubt of that;" and taking the oar, he showed the lady how he knew.

Meanwhile, the men began discussing

the probabilities of the boys having launched the boat; in which case, having evidently lost the oar, they would be left at the mercy of the tide; and "there's no saying where they may have been carried," observed Hardy.

So they wondered and conjectured, till one of them exclaimed, "Here's Harry Mason, and Bob Perrot with him;" and the man who had gone in search of him returned, bringing the boy, who was looking shy and frightened.

"Now, then, you young rascal," said Jonas, "just come and tell us what business you had to meddle with my boat, and what you've done with her."

"He says she went afloat, Jonas," said Harry Mason; "that they pushed her off."

Jonas roughly seized the boy, and shook him, bidding him hold up his head and speak out.

"Nay, Jonas," said Mr. Maitland, "speak

gently, man, or you'll frighten it out of him. Now then, my boy," said he to Bob, seating himself on the side of a boat, and drawing the boy towards him, while all the rest drew close to hear what was said, "answer me plainly and truly what I shall ask you. You were in Jonas King's boat with some others, eh?"

"Yes, sir," said Bob, shyly, and hanging down his head; then lifting it again, he glanced at Mrs. Leigh, and added, "but I didn't stay, ma'am, after you told me."

"Oh, you got out after Mrs. Leigh spoke to you?" asked Mr. Maitland.

"Yes, sir, almost directly."

"And did you go quite away then?"

"No, sir, not at once. I saw her get afloat, and when I was half up the cliff, I saw her a good way out; but then I remembered I should be wanted at home, and I ran on without waiting to see more."

"And who were in the boat then?" asked Mr. Maitland.

"Ben Sanders, Tom Hill, Ned Harris, Will Price, Charley Bateson, and little Johnny Craig."

"Charley Bateson," said Mrs. Leigh; "*he* was not in the boat when I spoke to you, Bob?"

"No, ma'am, but he got in afterward."

"I'd never believe of Charley Bateson that he'd meddle with my boat," said Jonas, decidedly.

"Are you *sure* he was there, Bob?" asked the lady.

"Yes, ma'am, quite certain." Then, as Mrs. Leigh still looked at him, he continued, "I think he went to help little Johnny Craig."

"Help him?" said Mr. Maitland,— "help him to do what?"

"To get out. You see, sir," said Bob, recovering from his fright, as he found

himself encouraged to speak, "Ben was angry when I got out, and called to the others that the boat was getting afloat; and when Johnny wanted to get out, he tried to keep him back, and then Johnny called to Charley, who went to him; and I don't know how it was, but when I looked again the boat *was* afloat, and they were all in her, and seemed to me to be fighting about something; but that was all I saw, for I ran away, and don't know any more."

"Well," said Mr. Maitland, rising, and putting the boy from him, "it's clear, I think, that the boat has drifted out, and been borne away by the tide, and those boys have no control over her, or means of getting her in again. I should say, men, some of you had better put off to look for them."

"That's just what we must do, sir, if we wish to see any thing of them again," an-

swered one of the men; and they immediately began an eager discussion among themselves as to the probable direction in which the boat had been carried.

Quickly, two or three boats were launched and manned; and the men rowed off, having agreed with each other what course each boat should pursue, and arranging that all should return when it grew dark, by which time they hoped some one among them would have been successful in the search. Those left upon the shore wandered about, anxiously scanning the sea in all directions, and indulging in various conjectures. Meanwhile, the intelligence soon spread in Ashcombe, and many came down to the beach to learn the truth of the reports they had heard, and hear all they could. Bob Perrot found himself the center of an attentive group of listeners, and was questioned over and over again; soon every one knew all that

he could tell, and the names of the missing boys were quickly circulated through the village. The news brought their mothers or other relatives to the beach, and little knots of persons were soon collected here and there, talking it over, while many were the hard words lavished on Ben Sanders, who was understood by all to have been the author of the mischief. His idle ways were commented on, and it really appeared as if all Ashcombe had long been saying "that boy would come to no good."

Mrs. Leigh was walking slowly homewards, when she met an elderly woman, poorly but respectably dressed, coming towards the shore. Catching sight of Mrs. Leigh, she dropped a courtesy, saying, "Good-evening, ma'am."

"Good-evening, Mrs. Bateson," said that lady.

"If you please, ma'am, have you seen my Charley? I gave him leave to go down

to the shore for an hour or two this afternoon, till I should want him, but he's never returned, and I can't make out what's become of him."

"I saw Charley here when I passed this afternoon," said Mrs. Leigh; then paused, and added, as she looked anxiously at the widow, "I'm afraid, Mrs. Bateson, you must not expect him home just yet."

Her manner alarmed the mother; she turned pale. "Oh, ma'am, has any thing happened to my boy?"

Mrs. Leigh immediately acquainted her with the particulars; she spoke very kindly, trying to cheer her with the hope she really felt herself, that the boat would soon be brought in. She begged her to come down to her house, which was nearer the shore than her own residence, promising that she should have a comfortable seat in the kitchen, and saying that Mr. Maitland had engaged to bring her the

earliest intelligence that arrived of the absentees. The poor woman thankfully accepted the offer, for she was far from being strong, and the news was a great shock to her. She went home with Mrs. Leigh, and several anxious hours passed, but nothing was heard of the boat, nor of those who had gone in search of it.

At last Mr. Maitland came in, but his report was far from consolatory. The boats had returned, none of them having seen any thing of the *Lucy King*, which was the name of Jonas's boat. He said every thing he could think of to cheer up poor Mrs. Bateson, who was terribly disappointed; for she had never anticipated the return of the boats *without* the boys. Mr. Maitland said that the men intended to start with the first dawn of day to renew their search, and Mrs. Leigh endeavored to prevail upon the widow to remain where she was until the morning, instead

of returning to her solitary dwelling. She said, however, she would rather go to her own home, which she accordingly did. Then Mr. Maitland told Mrs. Leigh that the fishermen anticipated rather a rough night, and that they had expressed great fears for the safety of so small a boat, with her inexperienced crew. That lady said she was glad he had not told Mrs. Bateson of this, and they separated, with many an earnest prayer that their fears might not be verified.

There were sad and anxious hearts in Ashcombe that night. The families to which the missing boys belonged were full of thought for them, and it might truly be said that their parents did not close their eyes at all, but as they listened to the howling of the wind, and heard the roaring of the sea as it broke upon the shore, the thought of what might even then be the fate of their children filled

their hearts with a terrible fear. The night was passed by them mostly in tears and prayers, and at the first dawn of morning they hurried to the beach, where they found several of the men starting on a fresh search: two or three boats had already gone. The shore was thronged with people all the day, and every glass in the place was put in requisition, earnestly scanning the horizon in all directions. The children, as they went to the Sunday school, were full of the subject; their teachers made reference to it; and when, during morning service, the prayers of the congregation were requested by Mr. Wilson for those in peril by sea, as well as for their anxious friends at home, there was not one who, for that time at least, was not an attentive worshiper.

After service, the question of every one was, "Any news of the boats?" while the disappointing reply was rapidly circulated,

"No, nothing has been seen of them." Almost every one went down to the shore, or ascended the neighboring cliffs. Mr. Wilson and Mr. Maitland slowly climbed together one of the higher points, talking, of course, of the all-absorbing topic. Round one of the points of rock, near the top, they came suddenly upon a man, who was gazing fixedly seaward, but upon their approach he started, looked round, and touched his cap, while he seemed anxious to shun observation.

Mr. Wilson, however, recognized him at once. "Will Sanders," he said, "is it you?" I am glad to meet you. I went to your cottage this morning, but I could not find you." His tone and manner spoke his real sympathy, and the man answered, though with an evident effort, "Thank you, sir; I could not stay at home."

"I dare say not," said Mr. Wilson; "it

is a terribly trying time for you. I did not see you in your usual place at church, Will. We did not forget the poor boys there."

"No, sir, I'm sure you did not; but I could not come, sir. I can't bear to hear what they all say of *him*, so I just got away by myself, sir."

"Ah, yes, they say it was his fault," said Mr. Wilson, though kindly.

"Yes, sir; and they say such hard things of him, — worse than he deserves indeed, sir, I'm sure."

"I dare say they do; but Ben has not been as steady as we could wish for some time back, you know, Will, and that gives them a handle to speak as they do."

"I know that, sir," said the father, with a look of bitter grief; "none knows that better than I; and many a time have I warned him, ay, and punished him, too; but you see, sir, I'm *obliged* to leave him

very much to himself, and then he gets led away, as I suppose he was yesterday, when his spirit's up; but I'm sure he never meant all they lay to him in this."

"No, Will, I don't suppose he did; and I have reproved many for the unkind and unfounded charges they have brought against him; still he was wrong from the beginning, and must bear the chief blame of what has happened, I'm afraid."

"Yes, sir, that's true, indeed, I fear," said poor Will, with a very heavy sigh.

Mr. Wilson spoke some more kind words to him, and urged him to go to the house of God in the afternoon, saying, he was sure he would find more comfort there than in indulging his solitary grief. And then he went with Mr. Maitland to see Widow Bateson.

They found the poor woman in her cottage: she rose, as they entered, from her seat by a small table, on which lay her

open Bible. She had evidently been weeping bitterly.

"You seek comfort from the right source, Mary, I see," said Mr. Wilson.

"Yes, sir; there's none to be had elsewhere, I'm sure. You've heard nothing more, sir, I suppose?" she added anxiously.

"No, Mary, I have not; but we need not give up hope. You know they must have drifted a long way off, and it will take a long time to find, and then to bring them back. We must wait patiently yet awhile."

"Yes, sir; I try to be patient, and trust God's will. He can take care of my boy."

"Yes, Mary; and you can have comfort when you think of your boy's conduct in the matter; not like poor Will Sanders, whom I have just met on the cliff."

"Ah, sir, poor Will! he's almost heart-broken. He came here this morning to

ask if he could do any thing for me, as Charley was away, and it was his Ben's fault, he said; but he did not seem as if he could bear to talk of him, or as if he had much hope of their safety. We could feel for each other, sir, for they are both our *only* remaining ones."

The poor woman's voice faltered as she said this, and her tears started afresh.

After a little more talk with her, Mr. Wilson left to visit the other anxious parents, though the time he could spend with each was but short. Again, in the afternoon service, as in the morning, the boys were remembered, and Mr. Wilson was gratified to observe Will Sanders had taken his advice, and occupied his accustomed seat, though he seemed scarcely able to lift his head; and, at the conclusion, when the congregation were dispersing, he would have shrunk away, if possible, unobserved, had not Widow

Bateson laid her hand on his arm, saying, "Will, I should like to go to the shore; will you give me the help of your arm, for it's almost too much for me?"

Willingly, though silently, he complied, and they proceeded together to the beach, where he made a seat for her of several of the largest and flattest stones he could find, rather apart from the general crowd, and continued to stand by her side while they gazed over the now calm and smiling sea, with feelings too deep for words. The whole population of Ashcombe seemed to be assembled on that beach. The long absence of the fishermen had strained their anxiety to the utmost; many a rumor that they were in sight had been circulated only to be proved false; when suddenly it was said, no one seemed to know whence the report arose, but it spread with magical rapidity, that Slater, the coast-guardsman from the neighboring

station, had made out, with his powerful glass, a boat approaching with another in tow.

Instantly the crowd pressed in a dense throng to the spot where Slater stood, while an almost perfect silence prevailed as they waited the result of his continued observation with his glass. "It is Harry Mason's boat," he said at length, speaking slowly, as though weighing his words; "and I think, but I can't quite make out; — ah! yes, I see now; yes, I am sure it is the *Lucy King* they have in tow!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE RESTORATION.

THE news spread like wildfire; a sort of shout broke from the crowd, but it was stifled as it were by a sudden doubt whether all were well, which rushed over every one. Widow Bateson stood up, and seized Will's arm, ejaculating, "Thank God!" but meeting his doubtful eye, and the words, "I hope they be all safe," she clasped her hands together and sank down again on her seat.

Fearful were the next few minutes to all; several of the men sprung into boats, and pushed off to meet the intelligence half-way, and soon, conveyed from one of these to another, from them to the shore,

came the welcome words, "*They're all right!*"

Instantly, as by an electric shock, the spell seemed broken, and one great cheer went up from the shore, and then the overstrained excitement of the people found vent in various ways: some were laughing, some crying, all talking incoherently, while they pressed close to the water's edge to welcome the returning boats. As they neared the shore, and the figures of the men and boys could be distinguished, many were the eager remarks made, such as, "How pale and tired they look!" "Poor lads! they must be very hungry," and the like.

Jonas King was the first to step into the water, and help draw up his boat; then, handing the boys out one after the other, with the greatest care, he lifted up little Johnny Craig, and placed

him in his father's arms, saying, "Poor baby, take him home at once, Craig."

"That I will," said the man; "his mother's half beside herself about him;" and without heeding the crowd pressing round, he strode on rapidly, right through them, nor stayed his pace till he could gladden his wife with the sight of her child safe and sound. She had wisely remained at home getting every thing in readiness to receive him, and met her husband at the door, with an exclamation of extreme thankfulness. With grateful hearts they ministered to his wants, and rejoiced together over his recovery.

The other boys were, in like manner, most gladly welcomed. Who could tell the unutterable thankfulness of widow Bateson, as she clasped Charley to her heart, or his tearful joy at finding himself again in her arms. Ben grasped his father's hand without a word, while Will

Sanders, on his part, was entirely overcome by this sudden change of his despairing sorrow into joy. Both drew aside and shunned obsevation.

The first excitement of the landing over, the men in Harry Mason's boat were quickly assailed with questions as to where they had found them. "Oh! they had drifted further than we should have thought possible." "It was well, indeed, that we managed to get hold of them; if they had been out another night, I doubt if they would have returned at all."

"And how had they managed to weather the storm?" asked Mr Maitland, whose interest from first to last had been unceasing.

"Oh! they seem to have done wonderfully well, sir, as far as we could make out," said Harry Mason; "only they were almost too worn out to stand much questioning;

and indeed, sir, how do you think we found them?"

"I can't tell," said Mr. Maitland; "almost in despair, I should think."

"Fast asleep, sir, every one of them. I never saw such a thing, never;" and the hardy fishermen turned away to hide his emotion.

Jonas now began to overhaul his boat, talking to the men around him, only a small group, as the people were rapidly dispersing, when he felt a hand laid on his arm, and turning saw Ben Sanders. The boy looked very pale and haggard, though his cheek flushed as Jonas turned to him, and he spoke with some difficulty.

"I hope you will forgive me, Mr. King, for having meddled with your boat; it was all my doing; the others are not to blame, and I want you to know that. I am very sorry, and heartily beg your pardon."

"That's right, my boy; I like to hear you speak so. You have my pardon, I'm sure, and I hope you've had a lesson you won't forget."

"I hope not," said Ben, in a low voice.

"There, you take him home, Will, and look to him," said Jonas, looking at him kindly; "The boy's well-nigh worn out, that's clear. Go along and get something to eat and get to bed, my boy; it's the best thing you can do."

Ben moved off, and Will, only stopping to say, in an earnest tone, "Thank you, Jonas," followed him quickly.

When they reached home, Ben sank into a chair, feeling very exhausted. His father brought him some food, and pressed him to eat. Ben roused himself to do so though he took but little, and Will said he had better go to bed. He moved to obey, but pausing ere he quit-

ted the room, he said, "Father, I have been a sad trouble to you."

"Yes, my boy, it was a sad trouble, indeed; but, thank God, I have you safe back again now," replied Will.

"But father, I don't only mean now, but for a long time back. Oh! I hope,—I hope I shall do better in future, father. I am so very sorry."

"Bless you, my boy," said Will, fervently. "God bless you, Ben!"

There was a pause; then Will said, "Come away to bed, my lad." Ben followed him, too weak and weary for any thing further; but as he lay in his bed, ere sleep visited his eyes, he thought deeply of what had passed, prayed God to help him by the gift of the Holy Spirit, and renewed his hearty vow to be different for the time to come.

The following morning Mr. Wilson went to visit each of the boys who had been

in the missing boat. He found them all very much better for the night's rest; in fact, as Hannah Price, Will's mother, remarked, "They've taken no harm, sir, save having had a fright, and maybe that'll do 'em good."

"I hope it may, Hannah, teach them not to meddle where they've no business — eh, Will?"

"I won't get into a boat again without father or some one else, I know that," replied Will, decidedly.

Upon entering Widow Bateson's cottage, Mr. Wilson found Charley just finishing his breakfast. "We're very late, sir, this morning," said his mother, dropping a courtesy, "but he did not sleep the first part of the night, and only dropped off towards morning; so I would not wake him, but let him sleep on as long as he would; and he's only just come downstairs."

"Better so," said Mr. Wilson; "he looks a little shaken."

Charley laughed. "Oh! I shall be all right very soon, sir, now I'm on dry land again. It's glad I am to be back here again, that's certain."

"And thankful too, Charley, I hope, to that God who watched over you. I suppose you felt somewhat doubtful how you would get through it during the storm?"

"Yes, indeed, sir, we did; it was very hard work to keep her afloat, and I scarcely think we should have done it any how, if it had not been for Ben Sanders."

"Ben Sanders!" said Mr. Wilson, in a tone of surprise. "Why I thought it was he who had led you all into the mischief?"

"Well, yes, sir; but he did his best to get us out again, when once we were in."

"The least he could do, I should say," returned Mr. Wilson.

"There's many a one would not have done so, sir," said Charley.

"Well, Charley, I am glad to hear you say this of Ben. The others spoke to me of him too. They say he asked you all to forgive him, and was the first to propose your joining in prayer together,—was it so?"

"Yes, sir," said Charley, looking down thoughtfully.

"Maybe, sir," remarked the widow, "he may be a different lad for the future."

"I think he will," said Charley, in a tone which struck Mr. Wilson, and led him to ask further questions, which drew from Charley, though rather reluctantly, something of what had passed between him and Ben. Mr. Wilson did not urge him, for he respected his reluctance, and justly considered he had no right to press the subject. After some more conversation, he took his leave, and bent his steps

to Will Sanders's cottage, feeling a more than common interest in Ben after what he had heard.

He knocked at the door, but not getting an answer, he lifted the latch, and said, "Is any one here?" Hearing a quick movement, he asked, "May I come in?"

"If you please, sir," said Ben's voice; and he entered.

The boy seemed a little confused as he returned his greeting, and added, "I did not hear your knock, sir."

"Never mind that now, Ben. I called to ask how you are this morning, after the last two days' adventures. You look tired; have you been up long?"

"Oh! no, sir; father brought me some breakfast in bed before he went to his work, and I dropped asleep again, so that I'm only just down-stairs."

"Your father was in great distress

about you when I saw him on Sunday, Ben," said Mr. Wilson.

"I dare say, sir," said Ben, dropping his voice and looking down, while he grew very red.

"We could none of us help feeling very doubtful whether we should see you all again. I suppose you had great doubts yourself, especially when the wind began to blow and the sea to rise?"

"Yes, sir;" and Ben felt a shiver come over him as he recollected that time.

"Perhaps, though, you were too busy in trying to keep the boat afloat to have much time to think about it?" said Mr. Wilson, in a kind tone, trying to win the boy to speak freely.

"Yes, sir; when the wind really rose, and the sea broke over us, we had not time for any thing then, but to bale out the water and try to keep her straight."

"And did you see the storm coming before it broke?" asked Mr. Wilson.

"Yes, sir; that is, Charley and I did; the others were asleep."

"And I dare say you were frightened then?"

"Yes, sir; I was, indeed."

"But now, Ben, if you could have felt free from blame in the matter, you might not have been so very frightened, would you?"

"I don't know, sir; perhaps not so much; but then I knew it was all my fault, and it did make me so very wretched, sir. When I thought of the others, too, I could hardly bear it."

"I can easily understand that, Ben; and very thankful to God you ought to be that you have not to reproach yourself now with any harm to either of your companions."

"Indeed, I am thankful, sir; and I hope I shall never forget those two days."

"I hope you will not, Ben. It has been sent you in God's mercy, I can not doubt, to check you in your downward course; for you know, Ben you have been going down hill lately very fast. This is not the first time I have warned you of it."

"No, sir; I know it is not. I wouldn't see it before, and I was only angry when you and father talked to me; but I saw it all on Saturday night, and I was very sorry then." He spoke in a tone of deep feeling.

"Very likely, Ben, when you saw the danger you were in of being called away from this world with your sins still unrepented of. I do not wonder you said you were frightened. And what did you do in your distress?"

"Charley talked to me, sir. I don't

know what I should have done but for Charley. He told me God would forgive me if I asked him for Christ's sake; and I tried, but I was so very frightened. Do you think he will forgive me, sir, and help me to be better? I'm almost afraid, when I think how bad I have been;" and he looked up to Mr. Wilson with an anxious glance, his eyes swimming in tears.

"I have no doubt he will forgive you, Ben, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake. He so loved us as to die for us; and he has promised his Holy Spirit to help us to be good."

"Yes, sir; that was just what Charley said," Ben eagerly replied; "and I felt then as if I might be forgiven and helped; but this morning I am fearful again."

"Then try the same means as before, my boy; think of our Lord's great love, and pray again."

"I was trying, sir, when you came in,"

THE LIBRARY
Union Theological Seminary
RICHMOND, VA.

said Ben, shyly, "but seemed not to know how, and then I got confused, and my frightened feeling returned."

"No need to be frightened, Ben. If you confess your sins truly, and truly repent of them, and ask God's forgiveness for Jesus' sake, you may feel very sure they are forgiven, and they need not frighten you any longer. But afraid,—yes, afraid you may well be; afraid of your own heart's weakness and folly, ever apt to betray you into sin; afraid of the temptations you must meet with in your daily life; afraid of the enemy who is always on the watch to take advantage of you, and beguile you to your destruction,—afraid of these, Ben, it is fitting you should be; only the fear must not frighten you, and make you think there is no use trying, but rather make you watchful and prayerful, careful to avoid even the appearance of evil, anx-

ious to turn aside from the first approaches to temptation, or firm to resist it if needs be you must meet it."

Mr. Wilson paused, and Ben, who had been listening attentively, said, with a faltering voice, "If I could only do that, sir! I feel now as if I would rather die than go on as I have been doing; but I can not trust myself, and it grieves my father so, I know; I can't think now how I could vex him as I have done;" and the poor boy, breaking down entirely, leaned forward on the table, and covering his face with his hands, sobbed bitterly for some moments.

Mr. Wilson let his grief have its way, and then said, as he laid his hand on his shoulder, "Listen to me, my boy."

Ben raised himself, and tried to check his sobs, while Mr. Wilson continued, "You say your conduct grieves your father?"

"Oh, yes, sir, indeed it has done," he answered, with difficulty.

"But he loves you dearly still, Ben. He was in great distress when he thought you were lost to him; he was very glad to bring you home again last night, I am sure."

"Yes, oh yes; he was so very kind; he never said an angry word to me. That made me feel it all the more."

"I have no doubt of it; and now he would be very glad to hear you were sorry for your fault, and rejoiced to do all he could to help you to do right, would he not?"

"Yes; I'm sure he would," said Ben, earnestly.

"Well, now, Ben, you can feel quite certain of all this as regards your earthly father, and you may believe just the same of your Father in heaven, only more certainly, more fully, inasmuch as he is the

Father of your spirit, and can help you at all times and seasons; for he is always with you and knows what you want before you ask him. He *will* help you, Ben, if you seek his help, and then trust yourself to it; for rest assured it is his will to make you *right*. You must be full of fear when you think of yourself, and your own weakness; but you may be full of hope and confidence when you think of him as your loving Father, able and willing to help you always." Shall I kneel with you now, my boy, and ask for you the help you need?"

"If you please, sir," said Ben; and they knelt together. Ben could not help feeling astonished how Mr. Wilson knew exactly all his thoughts and feelings, and put them into words for him. His tears flowed silently, and then his heart went up with each petition; and when Mr. Wilson concluded, he felt that there had been

a meaning in prayer which it never had before.

They rose and stood in silence for a minute. Mr. Wilson was just about to take leave, when the latch of the door was lifted, and Will Sanders entered. He started, and removed his cap respectfully as he saw Mr. Wilson.

"Good-morning, Will. I called in to see how your boy was this morning."

"Thank you heartily, sir, I am sure. I didn't think he seemed quite well this morning, so I left him to lie in bed a bit; but I could not help running down now, it being dinner-time, to see how he was getting on."

He looked rather anxiously at Ben's tearful face, and came up to him, adding, as he laid his hand on his head, "How are you, my boy?"

"Quite well now, I think, father, thank you," said Ben, glancing gratefully up,

though his eyes were near overflowing again.

"They seem none of them any the worse for their adventure," said Mr. Wilson. "I have seen them all this morning except Tom Hill, and I have heard a good report of him."

"I'm very glad and thankful to hear it, sir," said Will; "it was a mercy, indeed, it ended as it did."

"You may say that, Will; but I will not stay any longer. Good-by, my boy," said Mr. Wilson to Ben, shaking his hand kindly.

"Good-morning, sir, and thank you," said Ben: and Mr. Wilson left the cottage, saying, as he passed, to Will, who was holding the door open for him, "I think it has been a lesson to him, Will, and that you will have more comfort in him for the future."

In this true story, boys may see the evil results of disobedience, and may learn, too, how ready God is to hear us, if we pray to him, in the time of greatest trouble and danger. We are surrounded by perils on shore as well as on sea, and are none of us too young to die. Do you find it hard to pray? Do your sins seem to have such a hold upon you that you can not forsake them? Like Ben Sanders, do you feel as if God were "so distant from you" that you can not seek him? Think of Jesus, who loved the youngest, and died for the most guilty. Ask him to give you his Holy Spirit to help your infirmities, and create in you a new heart. He is waiting to save you. But remember that "Now is the accepted time: now is the day of salvation."

THE END.

PRESBYTERIAN COMMITTEE OF PUBLICATION RICHMOND, VA.